

5 lessons by Bill Watkins, CEO, Imergy Power & Ex-CEO Seagate

[Abhash Kumar](#) | December 21, 2013 at 8:33 am

The trek around the glaciers of New Zealand's South Island is arduous. Add to that, the harsh cold winds and incessant rains, it's a recipe to beat the morale out of the grittiest of individuals. Bill, one of the most 'hard-driven' CEOs was on one such trek, and the physical exhaustion was bringing out emotions in him like never before. He kept whining and complaining about the weather. The lady alongside had been listening to him for some time now. She had had enough. She stopped Bill and told him, "Bill, right now, you can be cold and wet and miserable, or you can just be cold and wet." That one line changed Bill Watkin's outlook towards life forever. It remains one of his biggest life-lessons.

Bill Watkins, CEO of [Imergy Power](#) and ex-CEO of [Seagate Technologies](#), the hard-drive maker, shared this anecdote with an audience of enthusiastic entrepreneurs at a talk organized by NASSCOM 10,000 Startups in association with TiE Bangalore at GINSERV Auditorium, Bangalore.



Bill Watkins

In the high-energy talk, Bill spoke about the five lessons that he learnt so far.

1. People don't want to die for their country or for money or for fame; but they are ready to put everything at stake for their fellow mates and loved ones.

To create the greatest of teams, startups should work on building a culture where everyone has got everyone else's back; where one person can just not let down the other.

2. Love the child you have, not the child you want.

Your No.1 challenge as a CEO or an entrepreneur is to work with the resources you have and not be taken in by the lure of the glittering prizes that await elsewhere.

3. You can be cold and wet and miserable or you can just be cold and wet.

As entrepreneurs, you need to let go of the illusion of control. You think you are in control of your employees, your customers, your competition, the weather; but reality is that you don't control any of those. The only thing you are in control of is you and your attitude and the passion towards your goals.

4. There is a very thin line between Principle and BS.

You might have a set of very strong principals, but if it means that you are not getting stuff done because your top priority is upholding your principles, then it's just BS. Set your priorities straight.

5. The only thing that matters is what you do.

Not the government, not the politicians, not your relatives, not your friends decide the outcome of your life. You could spend your life being dictated by outside forces, and discussing and debating the pitfalls of the policies or you could be doing things that get you closer to your goal.

After the highly engrossing talk, in a freewheeling Q&A, moderated by NASSCOM Product Conclave Chair Ravi Gururaj, Bill underlined the importance of taking risk as the main reason behind the success of the Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley is successful because the big winners don't walk off with their successes. Instead, they come back to the table and place even bigger bets on the future and on young founders. That's what is missing elsewhere in the world and is the secret which fuels the Valley's success. The amount of risk-capital at stake in the Valley, and the fact that people are ready to gamble and re-gamble their monies to drive ideas to execution is what has taken the entrepreneurial ecosystem to the level where it is today. Bill urged the people who are successful in India to take the mantle of driving the risk-capital economy.

When asked about what entrepreneurs can do to replicate the culture of Valley in India and make it the biggest startup hub of the world, Bill Watkins enumerated the following points.

- **Nurture big ideas and do big things. Don't be afraid.**
- **Don't blame the government.**
- **Your chances of succeeding are rarely impacted by the size of your ambition. You might as well swing for the fences in your new ventures.**
- **Be tenacious.**
- **It is ok to fail. It will teach you what you are made of and reveal your true character.**
- **Take risks, but learn to take managed risks.**
- **The key to managing technology is to use the money properly so that it shows up in the end-product.**

About Bill Watkins: Bill Watkins is one of Silicon Valley's most charismatic, colorful, controversial, and highly outspoken executives. Bill was the straight talking CEO of Seagate Technology when it was the world's largest manufacturer of hard drives; a role he left when the company refused to back investments in new flash drive technology.

Bill characterizes himself as a liberal, who is opposed to corporate taxation, enjoys a love and hate relationship with VCs, pulls no punches, rarely keeps his opinions to himself, is not compelled to be politically correct, joined the army out of high school, drives a \$200,000 Bentley convertible, snacks at Jack-in-Box, is a UT Austin liberal arts major, an ardent Hilary Clinton supporter, an avid adventure racer, owner of the Washington Stealth professional indoor lacrosse team, and raised money to build a museum dedicated to the Grateful Dead.

Bill joined Imergy Power last week as CEO, a role he was wooed to take on by Ira Ehrenpreis (General Partner of Technology Partners) a longtime champion of clean tech and one of Silicon Valley's most prominent venture capitalists and early believer in Elon Musk's Tesla Motors.

Bill Watkins has over 30 years of experience in managing high technology companies and carries a reputation for being a rock solid operating manager, who inspires the rank and file, commands the respect of industry analysts and who engenders loyalty from his customers. Post Seagate, Bill helped develop and market "supersmart LED light bulbs" as Bridgelux CEO where he raised over \$200m+ in VC funding and grew annual revenues to nearly \$100m. He serves on the Board of Directors of both Flextronics and Maxim Integrated Products.